

**DEP: "WE ARE GOING ... TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN."**

## Saxton: Ease up on easements

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BY NICHOLAS HUBA  
STAFF WRITER

LONG BEACH TOWNSHIP — Rep. Jim Saxton is asking the state Department of Environmental Protection to lessen its demand on its beach access plan so a \$71 million beach replacement project will not suffer.

Saxton, R-3rd, has written a letter to acting Commissioner Lisa P. Jackson asking the department to ease its beach access requirement, which would have easements located every quarter of a mile through Loveladies and North Beach. At each easement there would be parking and bathrooms.

"It's is my hope that the DEP will reconsider its access requirements, keeping in mind the critical nature of the beach project in providing adequate protection for the residents of Long Beach Island and their property against future storms," the letter to Jackson, dated Jan. 26, stated.

The department said it is standing behind their request.

"We are committed to it," said Elaine Makatura, a spokesperson for the department. "We are going to continue to work with the officials on Long Beach Island in order to make this happen."

Saxton said the cost of providing beach access at every quarter of a mile would be "astronomical."

Saxton said he is hoping a compromise can be worked out that is beneficial to both homeowners and the DEP, but has no specific suggestions with regard to the solution.

The proposed beach project includes the construction of a 125-foot-wide beach berm and a sand dune 30 feet wide; incorporates 347 acres of planted dune grasses and 540,000 feet of sand fencing; raises the beach 8 feet above sea level and dunes another 14 feet for a total height of 22 feet; replaces 7.4 million cubic yards of sand fill during initial construction and provides maintenance work about every seven years over a 50-year period.

As a condition of Long Beach Township's participation, the DEP is requiring the town to provide better public access to its beaches in North Beach and Loveladies — sections of Long Beach Township boasting palatial waterfront estates.

"It has taken us more than a decade to get this far, working with Republican and Democrat administrations in both Trenton and Washington," Saxton said. "Now I'm afraid N.J. DEP is adding such stringent requirements that it could put the project in jeopardy. I encourage DEP to work with the towns, not against them, to ensure reasonable public access and find ways to improve public access, not impose harsh conditions and financial hardships on LBI residents."

Saxton said the project is important to the future of the Island.

"This is the plan that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has advised that we should build to protect our six towns against hurricanes or nor'easters. In the wake of Katrina and New Orleans, I'd say that we would be wise in taking the Corps' advice. The fact that the federal government is funding 65 percent of the total cost of the LBI project will save the state millions of dollars," Saxton said.

Over the last few months, beach owners in Loveladies and North Beach have been questioning state and federal officials about issues, including insurance, the project's cost and parking.

Long Beach Township officials are in the process of writing a letter to the DEP about the beach access issue. The township met with DEP officials, but was unable to resolve the matter.

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